

NOTiCIAS DEL OSO

February 2, 2010

#10

It's finally February, and I've finally managed to change the date from '2009' to '2010.' It's a good thing I don't send these newsletters to my old editors.

With the beginning of this month, we've officially entered the "less than a month until TAKS testing starts" zone for 7th graders. However, what most students don't realize is that another standardized test is already out of the gates and headed for the finish line by the end of the month.

Today (barring a last-minute StuCo emergency), I will have prompts and lists of testing students in your boxes for the writing portion of the TELPAS. To help everyone out with their working knowledge of this all-important test for ESL students, I've put together a little list of the vital info for general education teachers, complete with as many cliches as possible.

As always, feel free to come to me with comments, questions or you're-asking-for-what? rants. I live for almost all of the above.

Erin VanSickle

TOP TEN

things you need to know about TELPAS

10. It's a constantly evolving process.

We in the world of Bilingual/ESL studies have the same problem that everyone in general education encounters with standardized testing: it keeps changing. As the state rules change to become more strict and/or require more information from the teachers and students, the district also throws new rules and regulations out there to keep up with the times.

9. TELPAS rates 4 areas: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing

I've said it before, and I'll say it again. You can't judge a person's language ability by their speaking alone. Most of my kiddos have great oral skills with the English language, but ask them to write it out and it's revealed that they're not as comfortable with their second language as originally implied. So, TELPAS tests everything individually to ensure a student's success in the classroom before being exited.

8. Reading is tested and rated separately.

It's just one of those things. Over the course of one week (though we hope it won't take so long), every LEP student will take the online Reading TELPAS to measure their ability in that area rather than asking the teachers to perform this task. Though we may think of it as dodging a bullet responsibility-wise, this is the portion of TELPAS where students who get test anxiety will have a harder time performing their best.

7. Supplemental aids are not allowed.

Though great for the TAKS and LAT tests, supplemental aids are about as useful on the TELPAS as my snow shovel now that I've moved back to Texas. They do their job, but they're just not appropriate in this situation. We want to measure students' fluency and ability with the English language, which means that they'll have to pull their own weight without the assistance of accommodations. There are other steps that can be taken to serve "double-dippers" appropriately during the ARD.

6. The TELPAS is rated hollistically.

Basically, it means that the person grading the student's language proficiency should be the teacher of record if possible. This is one reason why so many of our teachers have done the 'TELPAS rater' training - to account for students that I may have in only one, or in certain circumstances zero, classes. Reading is tested online in the spring, and we collect writing samples - but the other two areas are rated more subjectively on a longer performance window.

5. All LEP students take it - including denials and Special Ed. students

In order to make sure that we are not retaining students needlessly in an LEP qualification, we have a rather complex system to release any student currently under that classification - whether they are in my class or not. When you receive the list of students testing with TELPAS prompts, please make sure to read it thoroughly, especially if you are going to have to slightly ignore important fact #3 on the list.

4. I need your help on this one!

As Berry's ESL subpop grows, more and more teachers who may have never been involved in teaching LEP students or working with the TELPAS will begin getting their toes wet meeting state requirements this year - including helping administer the TELPAS prompts. However, I do promise that the grading will only be done by raters, which lets a majority of you all off the hook.

3. Writing prompts should [ideally] be given to the whole class.

Yes, these prompts aren't meant to be just designated tasks for a select few, but fun for the whole gang! Huzzah! The good news is that the writing only has to be done for approximately 15 uninterrupted minutes. The prompt could be an extended warm-up or reflection. As I note on the prompt cover sheet, if you want me to sit down and write a prompt about a specific TEK or subject that you're working on in class right now, I'm game. Or if you'd like to write your own, more power to you! Just make sure you send me a copy so that I know what to expect.

2. The work needs to be the STUDENT's work.

This isn't a test of how well an LEP student can ask for help, use a dictionary, or take a hint. Yes, we want all of our LEP students to do well and exit during their time at Berry so that they can start off high school in general education classes. However, the worst thing that any teacher could possibly do is help a student misrepresent themselves and exit too early. It's a recipe for disaster that isn't entirely the student's fault. So, when they ask for help, use tough love. Just say "no."

1. EVERYTHING IS DUE MARCH 8!

In order for my fellow raters and me to finish in a timely fashion, it's important to get those TELPAS writing samples turned in ASAP. In fact, if you turn them in before March 1st, I will bring you a delicious treat - with no nutritional value whatsoever - on March 2nd. Just do it.

Bonus points if you can correctly count the number of cliches I used. :)

ESL Student of the Week



Name: Alondra Lagunas

Grade: 7th

First language: Spanish

Fun personality fact: Alondra enjoys pleasure reading, but she doesn't have the time to waste on a slow plot, so make sure any suggestions you may give her have a high number of twists and turns.